New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1945

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THEATRE OPENINGS

"Marinka"

Complete reviews appear in this issue

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"Marinka"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
JULY 19, 1945.

By Burton Rascoe

'Marinka' Has Merits, But It's Sadly Ill-Timed

Someone should have whispered into the ears of Jules J. Leventhal and Harry Howard, producers of "Marinka," which arrived at the Winter Garden last night, that the current year is 1945. Maybe then they would not have been guilty of poor timing. For "Marinka" is simply not apropos.

"Marinka" otherwise has much to recommend it. Emmerich Kalman has written a score that is very caressing to the ear. His tunes are tasty smaltz, right out of the feed bag of Lisst and Strauss. Albertina Rasch has composed some dances that are sprightly and, in the best sense, old-fashioned. That is, they are choral, rather than ballet numbers.

A Good Cast.

The cast includes the lovely Joan Roberts, who created the part of Laurey in "Oklahoma!"; Luba Malina, who was so good in "Mexican Hayride;" Ronnie Cunningham, a vivacious singer and dancer; Romo Vincent, who would be a good comedian if he had been furnished any comedy lines (he had, at one point, to work in his night club imitation of Charles Laughton to get a laugh); Ethel Levey, first wife of the George M. Cohan (she makes an entrance and an exit, smoking a cigar); Taylor Holmes, Reinhold Schunzel and Harry Stockwell.

Hassard Short has given the show a good production. The music is well played by Kay Kavanaugh and his orchestra. The costumes by Mary Grant are pretty. And the settings by Howard Bay are nice. . . . But who wants to hear about the love affairs of Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria-Hungary nowadays?

Just a Royal Bum.

We have just concluded a war against an Austrian named Hitler; the Austro-Hungarian empire went to pot in 1914; the Hapsburg dynasty in Austria, in spite of the pretentions of the Archduke Otto, became extinct in 1922 when the Archduke Charles died in exile in Madeira; and even if Charles Boyer was a success in a movie called "Mayerling," which was about the amorous Austrian's last fling, there is something a little repulsive, right now, about romanticizing a royal bum whose only claim to notice was that he had a string of mistresses and got done in at a hunting lodge with one of them.

The book by George Marion Jr. and Karl Farcas is mechanical and often goes against the grain. As, for instance:

"Marinka: 'I had to slap the face of a dirty little anarchist in my kindergarten class today. He proposed a tax on incomes. It is hard enough to get people to work today without, taxing them for working.'

"Rudolph: 'I think he had a good idea. If it could be made a law, I could rescind it. Think how popular I could make myself if I rescinded a tax on incomes.'"

Good Songs.

Mr. Marion, on the other hand, has supplied Miss Malina with the lyrics of one amusing song, called "When I Auditioned for the Harem of the Shah," with which she stopped the show with repeated curtain calls.

Miss Roberts is sweet and pretty and her voice is clear and harmonious. With Mr. Stockwell she sang three songs which are pretty certain to become hits of the season, "If I Never Waltz Again," "Sigh By Night," and "One Last Love Song."

Mr. Vincent's specialty song of the show is "Old Man Danube," which is frankly derivative from Jerome Kern's "Ol' Man River."

'MARINKA.'

Musical play, with book by George Marion Jr. and Karl Farkas; lyrics by George Marion Jr.; music by Emmerich Kalman; production staged by Hassard Short; dances and ballet by Albertina Rasch; settings by Howard Bay; costumes by Mary Grant; presented by Jules J. Leventhal and Harry Howard at the Winter Garden Wednesday evening, July 18, 1945. The cast:

Nadine	Ruth Webb
Countess Von Diefenderfer	Elaine Walther
Bratfisch	Romeo Vincent
Crown Prince Rudolph	Harry Stockwell
Count Lobkowitz	Taylor Holmes
Naval Lieutenant	Noel Gordon
Count Hoyos	Paul Campbell
Francis	Leonard Elliott
Tilly	Ronnie Cunningham
Marinka	Joan Roberts
Madame Sacher	Ethel Levey
Countess Landovska	Luba Malina
Waiter	Jack Leslie
Lieutenant Baltatzy	Bob Douglas
Emperor Franz Josef	Reinhold Schunzel
Countess Hoebner	Adrienne Gray
Sergeant Negulegul	Michael Barrett
Lieutenant Palaty	Jack Gassert

New York Journal-American
July 19, 1945

'Marinka' Presented At the Winter Garden

By ROBERT GARLAND

There must be some kinder way of earning a living than being a so-called critic of the drama. Last night at the Winter Garden, I wished I could change my job—temporarily! Especially on so earnest an evening, with bright and wishful angels hovering hopefully around. Let me be a barker, please, down at Coney Island. Barkers know only bright and wishful words. And make happy use of them.

If I were a barker, if "Marinka" were a sideshow, if the Winter Garden were Coney Island, this write-up would be easy. I'd mention all the good things. I'd forget about the others. I'd mention the music of Emmerich Kalman. And the costumes of Mary Grant. And the personality of Ethel Levey. And the fun of Luba Malina. And the promise of Leonard Elliott. And the fulfillment of Taylor Holmes.

And I'd dwell at length on the splendors of the neon-lighted baton waved splendiferously by Ray Kavanaugh, maestro of the orchestra. Once upon a time I saw a conductor called Arturo Toscanini conduct an opera called "Tristan und Isolde" with just a plain black stick. After last night's directorial display, I wonder what wonders Arturo could have wrought with so Wagnerian a wand!

• • •

Happy Tragedy

Stalling aside, the facts of "Marinka" are that George Marion and Karl Farkas focus their libretto-minded attentions on the last century historic event that has come to be spoken of as "the Mayerling affair." For purposes best known to themselves and their fellow theatricians, they turn the story upside down, inside out, and pitch it up to a high-keyed love-and-let-live grand finale.

Nowanights, at the Winter Garden, it seems that the Crown Prince Rudolph and the un-royal Marinka have managed to get themselves confused with a guy named Romeo Montague and a girl named Juliet Capulet. From curtain rise to curtain fall, and during intermissions, maybe, they're constantly harping on those luckless Italian lovers. Yet at the evening's belated end, they proceed to do nothing whatever about them.

Nothing, that is, but climb aboard what looks like a haywagon and start out on a hayride that might just as well be Mexican. They sing, too, as they pull themselves together — "One Last Love Song," "If I Never Waltz Again," "Sigh By Night," "Turn on the Charm" and, as goes without reporting, "One Last Love Song" all over again, egged on by the company, the orchestra and Professor Kavanaugh's lovely light stick.

• • •

Oklahoma Prince

Judging by the type in the Winter Gardens' programs, Joan Roberts, Harry Stockwell and Romo Vincent are featured players. Miss Roberts, through the courtesy of David O. Selznick, pretends to be the peeress who loves a prince. It takes a good deal of doing and, owing to an "Oklahoma" accent, it's not at all times successful. Mr. Stockwell's Crown Prince suffers from the same Southwestern handicap.

Romo Vincent, featured equally with Miss Roberts and Mr. Stockwell, owes his prominence to an eating contest held at the University of Chicago. There, he won! Slightly less featured is Luba Malina, one of the brighter spots of "Marinka." Miss Malina owes her prominence in print to Southern Comfort, the Messrs. Shubert and "Mexican Hayride." Her singing of the song about the Shah is something.

Taylor Holmes and Ethel Levey, two of this repentant reviewer's favorites, have little to do and do that little nicely. Likewise for Leonard Elliott. And the Emmerich Kalman score, the Albertina Rasch dances, the Howard Bay settings and the costumes by Mary Grant are first rate, familiar unexciting. Taken as it came, "Marinka" neither adds to nor detracts from the midsummer Broadway season.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
JULY 19, 1945

By HOWARD BARNES

Soft Summer Breeze

A HANDSOME "romantic musical" has bounced into the Winter Garden to enliven this off-season of the theater. "Marinka" is sumptuously costumed, pleasantly wired for song and performed with a nice regard for old-fashioned operetta nonsense. The libretto is a pedestrian job, taking vast liberties with what is known about Mayerling tragedy, but it doesn't keep the show from striking fire in more than one of its dozen scenes. Howard Bay's settings, Mary Grant's couture, and Albertina Rasch's dance routines make the production a satisfying, if somewhat silly entertainment.

* * *

It is a pity that George Marion jr. and Karl Farkas did not conceive a moregraceful and humorous story line for the work. One might have accepted their happy solution of a recorded grim event with tolerance. It is hard to take some of the crude jokes and situations which bind the work together between melodies. Fortunately the Emmerich Kalman tunes are singable and are snug well, while they provide delightful accompaniment for the dancing. "Marinka" is remote and a bit rusty. It is still Josef.

* * *

Several of the songs are clumsily derivative, but most of them are almost certain to be hits in places where popular music counts. "Sigh by Night" and "One Last Love Song" are outstanding, but "Shah," as Miss Malina delivers it, is strictly a honey. The staging of Hassard Short is not what I would term inspired. At least it makes the best of a bad book. The ballet items are almost universally first-rate, with Ronnie Cunnigham lending pulchritude as well as talen to several choreographic figures. "Marinka" has a lot of shoddy in its composition, but it has few pretensions and it has solid "romantic musical" virtues.

* * *

Joan Roberts and Harry Stockwell play the leading roles of Rudolph and Marinka with easy assurance, whether they are singing and dancing or are involved in the convolutions of the plot. But it is Luba Malina who does the chief work in giving "Marinka" a casual and captivating quality. As the Archduke's ex-mistress, Countess Landovska, she achieves a the unpretentious, alt-Wien flavor which recommends this Jules J. Leventhal-Harry Howard offering. Ethel Levey has some fine hits as Madame Sacher. Romo Vincent is excellent as a dragoman for royalty and Reinhold Schunzel has a field day as old Emperor Franz

NEW YORK TIMES
JULY 19, 1945.

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Having previously reached Broadway in every other form, the events at Mayerling last evening bobbed up as the subject for operetta. "Marinka" is the name, and it tells the story of Crown Prince Rudolph, his Maria Vetsera and their entanglement, which ended in one of history's most famous hunting lodges. Giving an ending that is neither murder nor suicide, "Marinka" may have something for the historians; but as operetta for New York in 1945, it hasn't nearly enough. It suffers from book trouble, it lacks brightness, it could do with a great deal more charm. Both its basic plan and the manner of its execution seem dated.

* * *

George Marion Jr. and Karl Farkas have done the literary research. Their story opens in a Connecticut movie, where some youngsters decide the story of Mayerling is too tragic; the authors thereupon go on to show that it wasn't. But in doing so they run into a good deal of trouble. They make Rudolph neither a charmer, a roue or a good democrat born out of his time; their Maria is more silly thean tender. The events of "Marinka" are taken from stock operetta, and, being without gaiety, appear fully old-fashioned. Some of the dialogue, when Rudolph and the lady are calling one another Roemo and Jouliet, is maddening. Comedy never is a great feature of operetta, and "Marinka" follows that unhappy feature explicitly.

Emmerich Kalman has composed the music, which also is rather old-fashioned. The best number probably is "One Last Love SSong"—on a theme its title suggests—and there is a reasonably lovely item called "The Cab Song." There cannot be a "Vilia" in every operetta, of course, but the music of "Marinka" lacks the lift such a song can give, and its tunes all have a general sameness. The dances are by Albertina Rasch, and they are srevicable without being outstanding. They do not rise above the material, nor do they impart any moments of great excitement. Like the evening as a whole, they never seem to get under way.

* * *

Joan Roberts and Harry Stockwell, who both came to attention with roles in "Oklahoma!", play the two leading parts. Neither is particularly well cast, although both are able to sing. Mr. Stockwell makes Rudolph a rather wooden figure of a crown prince, and Miss Roberts does not provide more character than the vague mixture set up by the book. Romo Vincent is rotund and amiable as a cab driver with a voice, and Luba Malina is sultry and energetic as a countess whose favors had been distributed over the continent of Europe. Ronnie Cunningham and Jack Gansert are the chief dancers; Taylor Holmes and Ethel Levey have minor roles and Reinhold Schunzel wears the whiskers of Franz Josef.

Jules J. Leventhal and Harry Howard have given "Marinka" a nice production. Howard Bay's settings are good, as are Mary Grant's costumes. But neither their contributions, nor Hassard Short's direction, can cover up the fact that this summer's operetta belongs definitely to yesterday.

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NEW YORK SUN
JULY 19, 1945.

'Marinka' Is a Passable Show—Fair Score, Dullish Book, Bright Costumes.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Broadway shook itself from its summertime slumber last night and put on a play—a good-looking musical play called "Marinka," which brought a fairly pleasant score, a dullish book and some fetching costumes and ensemble numbers into the capacious Winter Garden. Jules J. Leventhal and Harry Howard make the presentation.

Placed upon the stage that was once graced by Gaby Deslys and only recently given over to the detonations of Olsen & Johnson, "Marinka" comes forth as a tolerable show. I've had far better evenings in the theater but at no time does the Winter Garden's new talent really wear you down. Hassard Short has done well indeed with the staging.

"Marinka" again presents the legend of the Mayerling hunting lodge in the year of 1889—material used in the film, "Mayerling," and in Maxwell Anderson's play of some seasons ago, "The Masque of Kings." It is still a story of love and intrigue but now the tragedy is gone and "Marinka" takes its place in the category of romantic operettas. If the scenes between the dashing Crown Prince Rudolph and the lovely Countess Marinka seem all too familiar it's because Viennese opera has been coming this way for a good many years.

"Marinka" has beauty, there is a lot of movement upon the stage and there is color in its groupings. Howard Bay's settings are excellent and the costumes of Mary Grant gay and imaginative. There is hardly a distinguished song in Emmerich Kalman's score, but his better numbers include "One Last Love Song," "Sigh by Night" and "The Cab Song."

The company assembled to play and sing "Marinka" is not an exciting one. The pretty and piquant Joan Roberts, who was so delightful as the original heroine of Oklahoma, still sings well but she seems quite out of place in the Austrian locale and quite miscast as the Countess. Harry Stockwell is only moderately good as Crown Prince Rudolph. Reinhold Schunzel has some good moments as the gloomy old Emperor Franz Josef. Luba Malina has all the exuberance in the world and was quite a show-stopper last night. Ronnie Cunningham is an excellent dancer. And the cast includes two players of long and valiant service in the local theater—Taylor Holmes and Ethel Levey, once of the glories of the Weber & Fields Music Hall.

"Marinka" is a costly show and a better one than Broadway generally gets in mid-summer. Its comedy is labored and its book both familiar and cumbersome, but it's always good to look upon and it is agreeable to the ear.

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NEW YORK POST
JULY 19, 1945

'Marinka' Laughs With Music But All Sings Not Sweetly

By Harriett Johnson

Crown Prince Rudolph and Marie Vetsera didn't roller-skate in the '37 movie, "Mayerling," or, so far as I can remember, in any other dramatization of Austria's 19th century hunting lodge tragedy. Maybe they had suppressed desires, but now they're a thing of the past. Any inhibitions got thoroughly aired last night when a musical version of "Marinka," fast-stepped out on the stage of the Winter Garden, probably to settle down there for a few weeks or months.

Marinka is a Broadway "shortening" of Marie, this being just a minor flip in a whirligig of major flip-flops and turnabouts characteristic of the current musical version. George Marion Jr. and Karl Farkas do somersaults with history, but Emmerich Kalman's score trots innocuously along, furnishing whatever is needed, whether it be a lush arrangement of the Austrian national hymn or "Old Man Danube," definitely a grandchild of "Showboat," or "When I Auditioned for the Harem of the Shah," a natural for Luba Malina.

As staged by Hassard Short, "Marinka" is a beautiful show to look at, superbly lighted; in fact, it spills over with intriguing and artistic color blends. You'll enjoy it a lot more, however, if you let your brain, especially your memory and your critical faculties, take a little snooze. Although history tells us that Rudolph and Marie committed suicide or were murdered, the Messrs. Leventhal and Howard present us the story as raucous comedy.

We get Bratfisch's version, as it was told to him by his father, Rudolph's cab driver. Rudolph, the ineffectual liberal in both politics and love, is played by Harry Stockwell, formerly an Oklahoma "Curly." His singing voice is warm but not dynamic enough for a glamorous Crown Prince. Mr. Stockwell is no Charles Boyer. But obviously the sensitive, tragic mood of the original story is wholly missing in the farcical "Marinka," and as is to be expected, the most successful moments are the humorous ones. Luba Malina as Countess Landovska stopped the show after her "Harem" song, and took about seven curtain calls. Ethel Levey as Madame Sacher, Leonard Elliott as Francis and Romo Vincent as Bratfisch all do well with lines which are only occasionally funny.

Miss Malina is the hit, but Ronnie Cunningham, who dances and acts Tilly in a charming manner, also scored a success. Joan Roberts, loaned from the movies to play the part of Marinka, is all right in producing what is expected of her, a burlesque of Marie. Attempts at drama appear like odd bits of ineptness stuck in as foil for all of the foolishness. Thus an excellent piece of acting by Reinhold Schunzel as the Emperor Franz Josef, is wasted in the shuffle.

There is a plethora of dancing, all of it breezy, occasionally on a stage that seemed too cluttered, but sometimes making a spontaneous and lovely effect. The orchestra directed by Ray Kavanaugh was excellent and the chorus exceptionally good to look at and listen to, both on the male and female side. "One Touch of Vienna" is a catchy waltz tune, and Mary Grant's costumes are, without a doubt, fetching.

The main pull from Broadway to Vienna is the scene in Mme. Sacher's famous cafe, which used to be one of the city's most irresistible claims to distinction. Too bad that "Marinka" isn't another "Sacher torte."

Wilella Waldorf is on vacation.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
JULY 19, 1945.

'Marinka' Hits It Off in Spots, Thanks to Star Efforts of Cast

By DAVID QUIRK

When Broadway's latest arrival, the musical "Marinka," isn't skidding all over the Winter Garden in the smut of George Marion Jr. dialogue and lyrics, it's not a bad little operetta.

This musical treatment of the old Mayerling story, a treatment which burlesques the characters but keeps a straight face on the old theme, isn't a top show, but it has its moments of fun, song and dance, due chiefly to the individual ability of the star musical comedy cast.

All night long they work like Trojans to overcome the Marion flare for spiking it with some of the corny and worst features of the same author's "Early to Bed" of two seasons ago.

Thanks to them, the show wriggles out of several judo twists that could have sent it into a pratfall from which it could never recover.

Scores in Love Lead.

Joan Roberts, last seen here in the original "Oklahoma," returns with a bang. She's cute as heck and her singing is right on the beam. And that's not due to the courtesy of any Hollywood producer or booking agent, even if his permission was necessary for her appearance in the show, as is noted in the program.

Another ex-"Oklahoman," Harry Stockwell, has the romantic lead opposite Joan. Although at times he appears a little too cardboardish to me, his singing is right in the operetta groove, and over all, he's better than the average musical Adonis. He has the good looks, but they're a rugged and manly type that you can't resent. Joan and Harry make a great looking couple for the colorful romance.

Then there's Luba Malina, last in "Mexican Hayride," who comes close to stealing the show with her accent and comic antics. Despite the suggestive tinge of the lyrics of her songs, she puts them over with assurance and almost makes you forget they're naughty.

Vincent Does Well.

Romo Vincent does a nice job with the comic lead despite the handicap of mediocre material. One thing he proves. He can handle a sympathetic, humorous role with skill. Once or twice during the evening he was forced to fall back on some of his own hocus pocus to keep the scene from falling dead. And he handles his singing chores in nice style. The big little man has a nice voice with plenty of power.

Ethel Levey makes one appearance in a little bit and I kept waiting for her to come back. The show could use a little more of her. Taylor Holmes, Leonard Elliott and Reinhold Schunzel, as Emperor Franz Josef, come up with good bits.

Ronnie Cunningham takes pretty fair care of the dance department and Albertina Rasch has staged a couple of Hungarian numbers that are okay. Emmerich Kalman's music, although tuneful and pleasant, isn't anything to write home about. It's too derivative, reminiscent of other and older tunes, with only one song, "Sigh by Night," a standout.

Mary Grant's costumes are colorful and Hassard Short has given the whole shooting match a nice pace.

When the book sticks to the original Mayerling it's okay, but the switches and trimmings injected by the authors and abetted by the composer just don't jell.

NEW YORK PM
JULY 19, 1945

—*Kronenberger*—

'Mayerling' Is Set to Music

The first new show to reach Broadway in many weeks, *Marinka* enjoyed all the advantages of a new girl in a small town after a long spell of the old familiar faces. To get something of a rush, the new girl seldom need be outstandingly pretty or peppy or bright; just have something nice, something a little different and appealing about her. *Marinka*, too, I think, could have caused a midsummer ripple without being anything very outstanding. Moreover, an operetta version of the *Mayerling* story, with the right lilting music, the right *Alt Wien* atmosphere, the right pretty girls and romantic lovers, would seem made to order for July. But by and large, *Marinka* has let its chances slide. The new girl has nothing new about her, is indeed very much of an old familiar face. There's nothing very dreadful to be said about the show, save possibly about the book; but—barring the sets and costumes—there's nothing favorable to say about it, either. It's just a harmless bore.

The Mayerling story has been reduced to a lot of foolish frippery and shorn of its tragic conclusion: Rudolph and his unroyal Mariaka are allowed to escape to America and live there happily ever after. That, perhaps, is nothing to get very upset about—no doubt musical comedies are entitled to musical-comedy absurdities and musical-comedy endings; though, considering its royal and high-romantic trappings, the standard version would still seem to me the better one. The real trouble with this kind of thing is that once the plot takes a beating, so does everything else connected with the enterprise. Viennese charm is submerged in Broadway corniness; the period atmosphere vanishes; the court of Franz Josef acquires all the elegance of Weehawken. As a result, there is no sense of style or tone or integration; and at the same time there isn't a compensating liveliness and verve. It's neither yesterday in Vienna nor today on Broadway. It's simply yesterday on Broadway, and not even the best of that.

* * *

Mr. Kalman's music, for one thing, doesn't make up for the Messrs. Marion and Farkas's book. Many of the tunes are pretty and melodious enough in a familiar way; but one song sounds much like another, and all the songs could have come out of any operetta written since McKinley was in the White House. And an orchestrational attempt to liven their beat only detracts in the end from their schmalziness. I guess there is nothing spectacularly gruesome about the book; there's just a terrible lot of it, mostly in the form of terrible jokes. A further drawback is a want of winning and distinctive personalities. Joan Roberts as Marinka and Harry Stockwell as Rudolph sing their songs nicely enough, but these veterans of *Oklahoma!* quite lack the grace of the Old World; she seems cornfed and he seems stiff. The one lively performer is Luba Malina, in the role of one of Rudolph's discarded countesses. She has showmanship and a good Broadway manner, and she should do fine in some other show, as something less classy than a peeress.

Albertina Rasch has staged the dances, which are agreeable but in no way distinguished. Indeed, whatever distinction *Marinka* possesses lies in some of Howard Bay's sets and, in Mary Grant's costumes—her peasant costumes at the end of Act I are, indeed, superb. The girls who wear them, however, are another of *Marinka's* many unexciting features.

—Louis Kronenberger

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